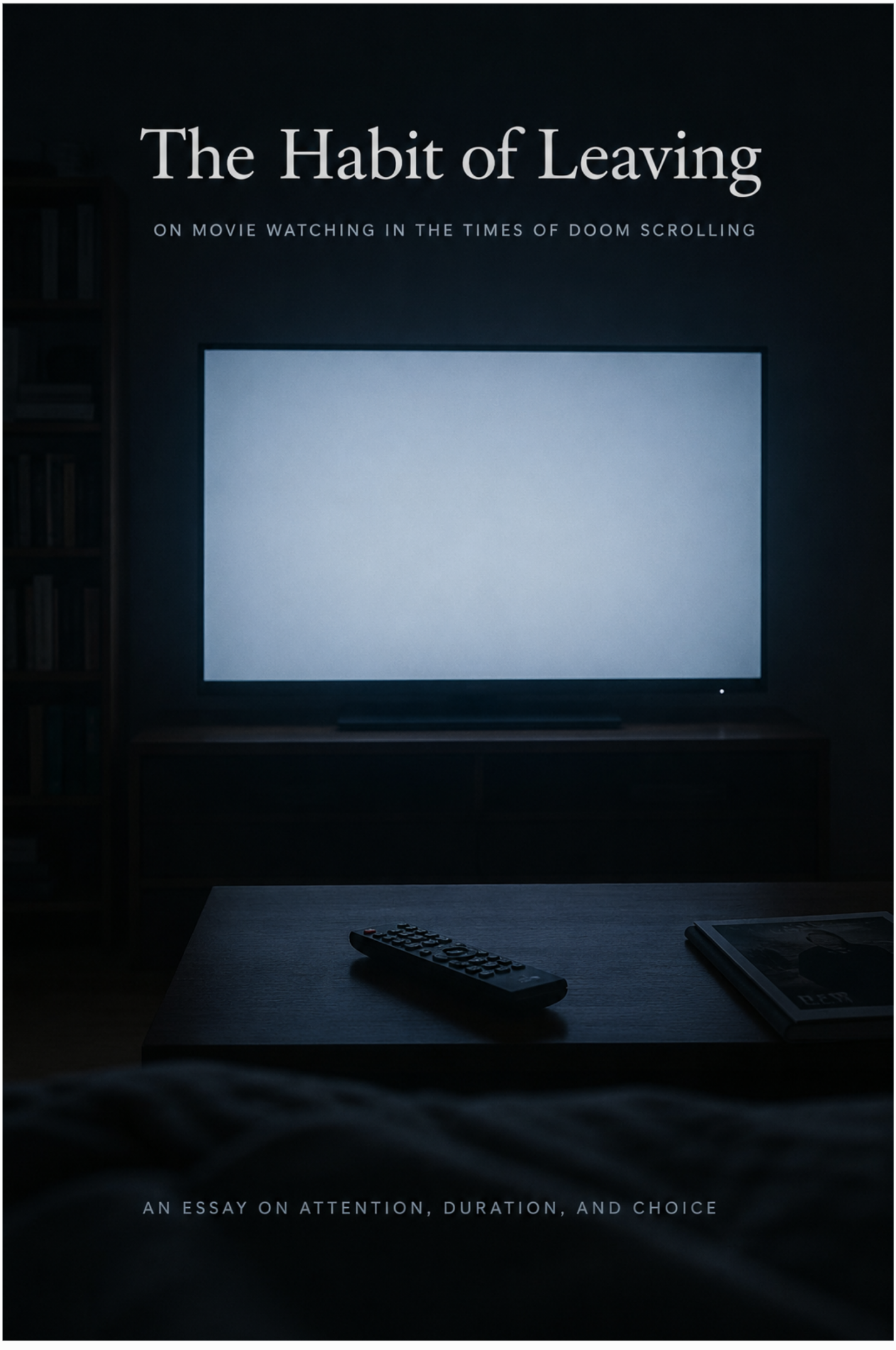
The Habit of Leaving

ON MOVIE WATCHING IN THE TIMES OF DOOM SCROLLING



AN ESSAY ON ATTENTION, DURATION, AND CHOICE

You are twenty minutes into a film.
Nothing has failed. Nothing demands exit.
And yet your attention has already loosened its grip.
Not on the film itself—
but on the obligation to remain.

There is no argument. No clear dissatisfaction.
Only a slight internal shift,
as if duration had quietly lost

its authority.
Your hand moves almost
without you.
A minimal gesture.
Next.

What appears as choice is, in
fact, withdrawal.
We tell ourselves we are
selecting.
Refining. Adjusting.

But this movement from one
film to another
is rarely guided by judgment.

It is guided by impatience that has learned to speak in the language of taste.

The endless catalog only intensifies this illusion.

Everything is available.

Therefore nothing must be endured.

Each abandoned film confirms a premise

that remains largely
unspoken:
that meaning should arrive
early,
or not at all.

Cinema does not function
under these conditions.

It is not a sequence of
immediately legible
fragments.
It unfolds—or fails—across
time.

A film like 2001: A Space Odyssey does not ask for approval.
It proceeds, indifferent to the tempo of your attention.

Or Stalker—it delays, resists, withholds what it could easily give.

To leave such films early
is not to reject them.
It is to refuse the terms under which they exist.

But refusal has become a habit.

One begins to notice that the films are no longer the problem.

The viewing itself has fragmented.

Beginnings accumulate without consequence.

Endings disappear.

You move across surfaces
without ever encountering
resistance.

A fluency develops—
not in understanding, but in
departure.

At some point, the pattern
becomes visible.

Not as failure,
but as a quiet erosion.

You are no longer watching

films.
You are regulating exposure.

So a decision is introduced.
Deliberate. Artificial.
To remain.
To watch the film in its entirety,
regardless of its quality.
Not as an act of respect—
but as an experiment in duration.

The first film this applies to is bad.

Competently made,
sporadically diverting,
and finally without necessity.
It earns nothing.

But staying inside it reveals
something
that leaving never would have:
the exact texture of its failure.
Not as verdict, but as
experience.

The third act that keeps
arranging itself
without ever becoming

inevitable.

The performance that is always slightly aware of itself.

These are not reasons to leave.

They become, instead, material.
Something to sit with and name.

And occasionally, something else shifts.

A film that seemed inert
gathers weight late, almost
against itself.

A scene lingers—a woman
watching a door
that never opens.
A gesture settles—a hand
placed on a table
with more grief than the
script intended.
Not enough to redeem it.
But enough to complicate
dismissal.

Boredom returns as well.
Not as absence, but as
substance.
It arrives with its full weight,
becomes the actual texture
of the hour.

You notice the particular
quality of your restlessness—
how it moves in waves,
how it briefly convinces you
the film is the cause,
then passes,
and the film is still there,
unchanged, waiting.

This is not nothing.
To feel time pass slowly,
consciously,
without escaping it—
this is a capacity that
atrophies.
The experiment is, in part,
about recovering it.

It becomes tempting to
conclude
that the film does not matter.
That only the act of watching
remains.

There is truth in this.

Attention can animate the most indifferent material. Without it, even the most accomplished work collapses.

But the conclusion does not hold entirely.

There remain moments—
rare, but decisive—
when something on the screen interrupts you.

Resists your framing.
Exceeds your intention.

In those moments, it
becomes clear
that the encounter is not fully
yours to construct.

The final minutes of a film
that has not justified itself.
No revelation.
No sudden coherence.
Only an ending.

You remain.

Not because it deserves it,
but because departure is no longer automatic.

And when it is over,
there is no immediate replacement.

Only a brief stillness—
the kind that arrives not after satisfaction,
but after something has simply
run its full course.

As if the ability to be
somewhere completely,
without the shadow of
elsewhere,
had been briefly,
imperfectly,
returned.